

The Impact of Blue Crab Dietary Behavior and Demographic Traits on the Consumption of an Invasive Species

Experience description: My STEP Signature Project was based in Savannah, Georgia on Skidaway Island. I lived and worked at the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography at a field site called Priest Landing. I worked on a research project with an OSU graduate student that focused on the predator-prey interactions between native predators and an invasive crab species. This invasive crab, called the Green Porcelain Crab, lives in oyster reef communities on the southeastern coast of the United States. The Green Porcelain Crab has spread from Florida up through South Carolina. My day to day activities included collection of organisms, lab set up, and running behavioral-focused experiments through a series of feeding and behavioral trials.



Impact on Personal, Academic, and Life Goals Moving Forward: This transformation and change that occurred during my summer in Georgia is a crucial part of my life and future career goals. I plan to graduate with research distinction and this research project will be used to achieve this goal. Along with that, I plan to continue my education in graduate school in the field of marine biology. This research project was strongly rooted in marine ecology and behavioral ecology, which are two fields that I am really passionate about. This experience was very important because it immersed me into the type of work I will be doing as I go on in my academic career and I was able to see how it worked and verify that I enjoy it and it is what I want to pursue.

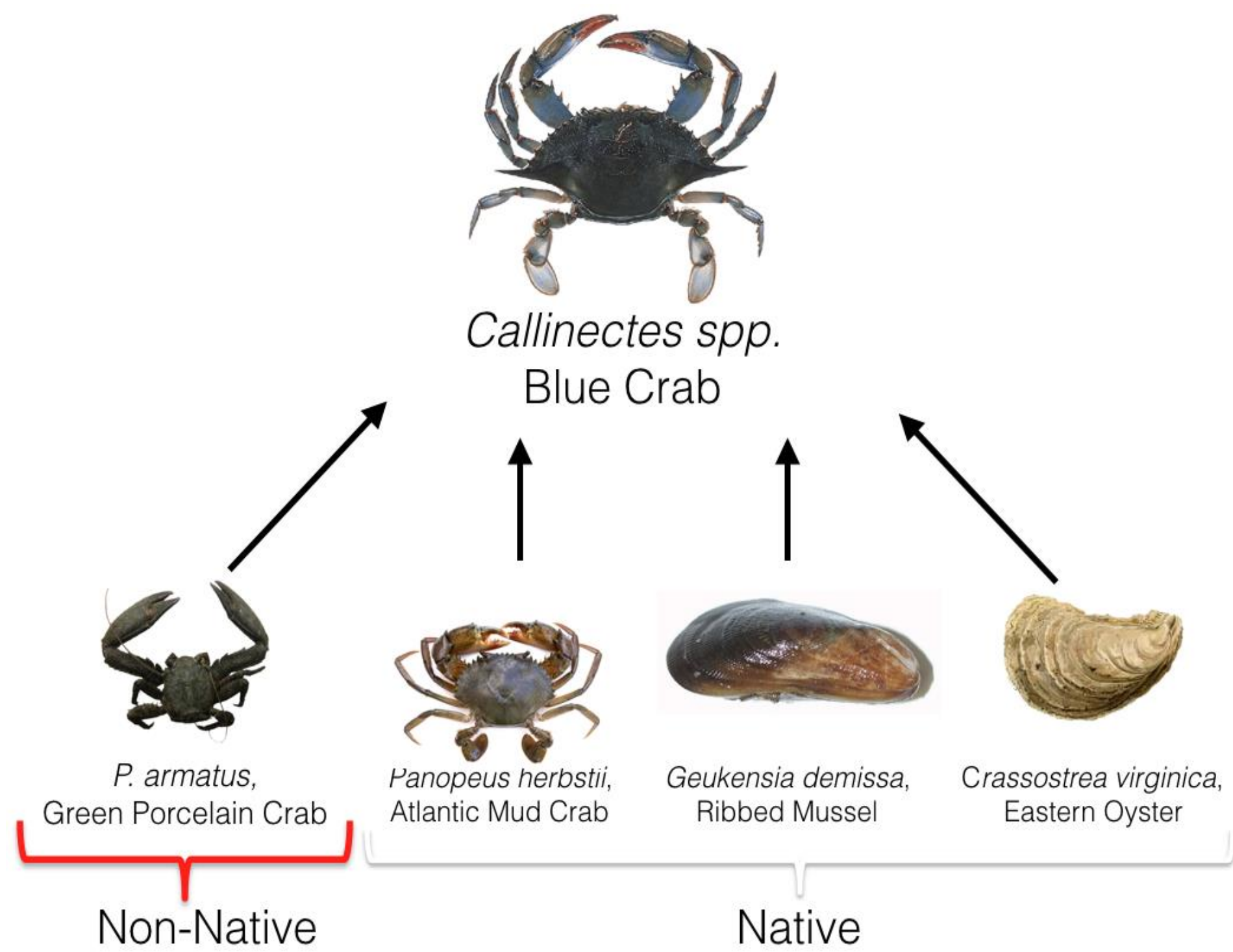


Favorite Part of Experience: My favorite part of my experience is hard to pinpoint because I enjoyed every part of it. One aspect that I would say I enjoyed the most was the field work. I love being immersed in the ecosystem I am studying and getting my hands dirty. The collection of organisms was very physically intense and I had a great time doing it. Being able to identify the many organisms in the ecosystem is something that I enjoyed doing. A highlight would be our trip to North Carolina to the Institute of Marine Sciences at the University of North Carolina. There, we were able to explore a new city and were able to experience collection in new places. One of the collection sites in North Carolina was attached to a nature trail and had intense mud. It was very exciting and I would love to go back at some point.



Personal Impact: What I came to realize after having this experience is that I understand a lot more about myself than what I previously did. I thought that since I have always been quiet and conserved, that I wouldn't branch out that much in Georgia. From the beginning to the end of my time in Georgia, I never once felt unprepared, nervous, or quiet. To my surprise, I am a lot more independent and confident in my skills than I previously thought going in to the summer. I now understand that I was ready for this next step in both my academic and social life.

What I Learned: I was able to learn and refine practical skills and useful qualities. At the beginning of the process I had the opportunity to write a research proposal (something that I haven't done before). During 3 months on the island, I was also able to gain a deeper understanding of the scientific method by running my own experiment and also overserving/helping the graduate student with her experiments. I took a lot away from this experience. I refined my problem-solving skills for when things in the lab did not go as originally planned and I learned how to think more critically throughout the entire process. I also refined my skills on how to prepare and run my own experiment which is very beneficial.



STEP
SECOND-YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL
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